No 23

No. 11

On the Use of Turpentine
— in Epilepsy —

By James H. B. Malcomson

read Mar 29 1817

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Epilepsy is a disease, frequent in its occurrence and obstinate in its nature. Every expedient which promises the slightest chance of success in its cure should be fairly and cautiously tested by a judicious course of experiments until we have become clearly and fully acquainted with its powers. All admit the propriety of such a proceeding. But there are many obstacles which stand in the way of its adoption. Not to mention the general obstinacy and fatality of the disease, most of the remedies which have been so confidently recommended for its cure have either fallen into disuse, from their entire inefficacy, or are retained merely as palliatives. This would effectually damper all spirit of inquiry were we not impressed with the belief that a failure in our attempts to cure diseases, is not attributable to the necessarily fatal nature of those diseases, but to the present imperfect state of Medical Science. Bearing this in mind fresh vigour will be added to our exertions.

Among the numerous remedies recommended in Epilepsy is the Oleum Terebinthina. Of

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late its use in that disease has much excited the attention of Physicians. And, it is said to have proved successful in many instances. With the view of testing its efficacy and of ascertaining, to what particular cases of the disease, it was more especially adapted. I took up the consideration of the subject. I am well aware of the requisites which an Experimentalist should be possessed of in the pursuit of a subject of this kind. "Besides" says Moore "natural acuteness and sagacity, it requires the exact weighing of every concomitant and collateral circumstance which can promote retard or prevent the effect of the medicine at the time it is administered." Confessing my deficiency in this respect however, I am happy to state that that deficiency was amply supplied by my able Preceptor Dr. Prideaux in whose practice most of the cases I have detailed, occurred and whose judgement guided me in the application of the remedy.

With these introductory remarks, I proceed in the first place to a detail of the cases in which the Turpentine was exhibited, and propose next to make a few remarks on each of them.

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Case 1st

Jane, Aetat 26, of a Phlegmatic Temperament, was placed under the Care of a Medical Gentleman on the 10th of March 1816 for the Cure of Epilepsy, of which she had been the Subject the preceding twelve months.

From the excellent health she had enjoyed previous to its attack, - and the good character she bore as it respected sobriety and regular habits, no evident cause could be assigned for her disease - At the time she applied for advice, her menstruation was regular - and except the disease her general health was in every other respect good -

She informed me that the fits observed no regularity in their recurrence at first - but that they had evidenced a disposition to become so for the last four months, she having had three in that time at regular & equidistant periods -

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Her system being somewhat excited, at the time she was first visited, it was deemed proper to reduce it in some degree before she commenced with the use of the Turpentine. This being effected, and the system thereby prepared for its reception, she was ordered, on the 19th of the month, to take a teaspoonful of the turpentine three times a day.

On the 2nd of April, twelve days after she began this plan of treatment, she had a fit, but which, she informed me, was more mild than any of the preceding ones. The medicine was now continued with an occasional suspension of its use to obviate strangury until the middle of July, when thinking herself cured, she refused to take any more of it.

It may be proper to state here, that during the whole treatment, the turpentine had no other sensible effect on her system, except that of exciting the pulse which, however, was only evident during the first two weeks of its use.

October 20th 1816. It is now better than six months since she had the last fit.

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Case 2nd

Miss M— Ætatis 12 of a delicate and feeble constitution was seized with Epilepsy on the 20th of June 1813 The attack was not preceded by any symptoms of indisposition She had three fits on the 20th and two the succeeding day.

From the success that had attended the use of the Oleum Terebinthinæ in the Epilepsy of Children a short time since in Charleston, it was concluded to make a trial of it in this case.

The patient was accordingly ordered on the 21st of June a small teaspoonful of the Turpentine in a little mucilage morning and night.

On the 28th she had two more fits— It was now thought prudent to give the same quantity of the medicine, thrice times a day.

On the 28th the Turpentine purged her and brought away by stool several worms.

The cause of her fits being now made known, she was ordered a continuance of the medicine with the view of ridding completely the alimentary canal of any more of these animals

that might have been left behind.

Worms however, appearing by the 3rd of July it was conceded that the whole of them had been evacuated already. She was therefore ordered to discontinue its use.

October 22nd 1816 This young Lady has continued well ever since.

Case 3

Chip E— M— Ætatis 14. a sister of the subject of the preceding case was attacked with Epileptic fits in August 1816, nearly in the same way. Concluding from the circumstances of her sister's case, that the disease have originated likewise from worms in the alimentary Canal the Santonine was immediately resorted to — she took a large teaspoonful of the medicine in mucilage morning noon & night. In three days after she commenced its use several worms were discharged by stool. This circumstance confirmed our suspicions.

The propriety of continuing its use a few days

inger was suggested to her Mother. but she strongly objected to it giving as a reason, the sickening effects it had on her Child. However notwithstanding this the case terminated happily.

October 22nd 1816 This patient has also continued well ever since.

Case 4

On the 28th August 1815 Mr. J. K. Grocer requested medical assistance for his negro Girl, who had been the subject of Epilepsy the preceding nine months

This Gentleman informed me that he could not assign any probable cause for the disease, with which this unfortunate Girl was afflicted. He stated that she had had during the whole of this time, a fit of Epilepsy every third week, but that on the 10th of the present month ten days before the regular period of its return, she had a very violent fit and on the 20th the day on which he called in medical aid she had

three severe ones in the course of two hours.

This increase in the violence of the fits, and the frequency of their recurrence, added to the total failure of every plan of treatment that had been adopted for their cure, induced him at once to consent to a trial of the turpentine, the use of which, he had all along opposed.

This girl was in her 18th year of a delicate constitution and regular in her menstruation.

On the night of the 20th her system being somewhat exhausted as was evidenced by nervous tremors & a feeble pulse, she was ordered a little Wine whey & a suitable draught of Laudanum & the Compound tincture of Castor to be taken at bedtime.

Being in some measure revived on the morning of the 21st she commenced the use of the turpentine in the dose of ʒij. by measure in mucilage morning, noon & night.

On the 28th she had another fit. On the 3rd of September the occurrence of Strangury obliged us to suspend the turpentine for a few days. But by the 6th of the month it entirely disappeared

and she resumed the use of the medicine — From this time to the 15th of October she continued its use as directed, with the happy effect of putting a complete stop to the disease

As the turpentine in the above case had a strong tendency to produce strangury it may be proper to state that its use was suspended a day or two at a time — whenever the symptoms of that distressing affection showed themselves

October 15th 1816 It is now more than a twelve month since she discontinued the use of the Turpentine and has, much to my satisfaction continued well ever since —

Case 3

1. Man. Seaman — Ætatis 30, was admitted into the Marine Hospital of Charleston S.C. on the 18th of May 1816 for the cure of Epilepsy, with which he had been afflicted upwards of a twelve month.

He informed me that he was first attacked with the disease sometime in March 1815, a day or two after he had received some very

whelming information respecting an unhappy change which had taken place in his fortune.

Previous to this he enjoyed uninterrupted health. The Physician attached to the above Institution, judiciously put into practice, the remedies usually given in Epilepsy, without any advantage. Guided by the state of the system, he was bled purged and salivated; - he took Bark. Zinc. valerian. Copper. and various other medicines.

As nothing which had hitherto been given had produced any good effect I proposed to Dr. - on the 2nd July 1816. a trial of the Turpentine, to this he readily assented. - Mars was accordingly ordered a teaspoonful of the medicine in mucilage morning noon & night. It was taken from this time until the 3rd of September without effecting any sensible change in the system.

On the 6th he had two fits - and continued to have one daily for the three succeeding days.

His system at this juncture was much altered his articulation difficult - and his

mind evidenced symptoms of Fatuity.

In consequence of this state of things the Cupren
ton was immediately discontinued

A continuance of the above mentioned unfavou.
able symptoms prevented his resuming the use
of the medicine.

He died about the end of the month.

The symptoms that attended this unfortunate
case, led us to suspect the existence of mischief
in the Brain, - it was therefore agreed to examine
it accordingly, twenty four hours after death, the
head was opened, and the brain examined. It rapidly
exhibited strong marks of high excitement. Contin.
uing the dissection, we arrived at the ventri.
cles from which we obtained nearly ½ of a
serous fluid

Case.

Mary Flemming - a coloured woman aetatis 25
of a robust habit of body was received as a patient
by a Medical Gentleman in November 1815.
She has been the subject of Epilepsy from her

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childhood. It appears she has an attack of her disease once in three months.
The gentleman who attended her informed me that from what he could learn of the origin of the disease in this case he felt convinced it was hereditary. That notwithstanding this, he thought it both prudent and humane to make a trial of the Turpentine. The following draught was ordered every second day.
℞ Ol: Terebinthinæ ℥ss. Mucilag. Gum. Arab. ℥iij m. This plan was adhered to for two weeks with the effect of purging her slightly.
Her Physician being of opinion that its operation in this way "took away from the anti epileptic powers of the Turpentine" he now ordered one half of the quantity to be taken at the same intervals — This she continued: take until the 20th of December without any disagreeable effects.
On the 27th of the month the period of the return then fell, she had a severe attack which left her partially paralytic for the succeeding week

inviced that the Turpentine here was productive of more real injury than any of the mercury she had previously taken. It was left off entirely & calomel taken in its stead.

The Gentleman who favoured me with the above case, has since informed me, that the Turpentine was tried a second time, but with the same unfavourable results.

Having now given a brief and I hope accurate account of a few of the cases in which the Turpentine was exhibited I proceed next to make a few remarks on each of them.—

By a reference to the first & fourth cases it will be found that the turpentine put a complete stop to the disease and it appeared to effect this without any sensible evacuation from or operation on the system. It is true, as is stated in Case No. 1. the patient was somewhat excited during the first few days of its use. and I may add

such was the fact with respect to the other cases, but it soon lost this effect in every instance. It will be recollected also, that both of the subjects of these two cases, were regular in their menstruation.

Feeling anxious to test fairly the efficacy of the turpentine I ordered the stools of these patients to be carefully examined, with a view of ascertaining, whether there existed in the alimentary canal any worms, to whose presence the disease might have been attributed. This was done, but none were discovered.

Now as there was no sensible evacuation from the system or discharge of worms it may be asked, how did the turpentine operate in curing these cases? I confess it difficult to give a satisfactory reply. I shall therefore not make any attempt to approach a solution, contenting myself with observing, that it probably acted by substituting a new action for that of the disease and thus effected the cure.

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From the circumstances connected with the 2d and 3d Cases it is evident that the disease in both of them was occasioned by the irritation of worms in the alimentary canal - for as soon as they were evacuated. the fits immediately ceased.

The efficacy of the Turpentine then in such cases is to be attributed to its anthelmintic powers -

As Epilepsy does in some instances become confirmed by repetition notwithstanding the removal of its cause. And as the Turpentine appears to exert a peculiar operation in curing the disease when it proceeds from other causes than abdominal irritation. would it not be advisable to give it in all cases of Epilepsy proceeding from worms in preference to other anthelmintics? A firm belief that many of the cases of Epilepsy in Children, originally the product of these vermin - be

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some confirmed by repetition and are kept up in this way - has induced me to propose the foregoing questions.
If the opinion be well founded and the turpentine really exerts the peculiar operation alluded to I would not hesitate to declare it better adapted to these cases of Epilepsy than any remedy heretofore recommended

On the Case of Mary, little need be said. His disease was evidently of mental origin, and as such - there was little prospect of a cure being effected -
Notwithstanding the great caution that was taken not to exhibit the turpentine in his case - when there existed any contra indication to its use - still it had the effect - of increasing the frequency of the fits and of exciting considerable arterial action - From the history of the case and the phenomena which the brain exhibited upon dissection. I am clearly of opinion

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the turpentine hastened the appearance of the symptoms of Fatuity - which came on near the close of his existence - and I may safely add, shortened his life -

In the case of Mary Hemming the turpentine was productive of real injury. This was witnessed by the paralytic condition in which the fits left her while she was under its use. It will be recollected she made a second trial of the medicine, but with the same unfavourable result -)

Indeed the disease was of such long standing that nothing favourable could have been expected from the turpentine. I say long standing - because it is not reduced to a certainty whether the disease in this case, was hereditary or not - altho' this was the opinion of the Gentleman who attended her -

In addition to the above cases

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there were several others in which I have seen the turpentine tried, but in none of them was the result favourable

Two of these were of Hereditary origin In one case the turpentine was persevered in, from time to time, for six months without increasing the fits or affecting the system in any sensible degree — notwithstanding this, the disease was not even palliated —

In another case that of a, Man aetatis 40. who was addicted to drink — the turpentine had an injurious effect — The fits became so frequent & came on so suddenly & unexpectedly — that the patient was afraid of leaving home unattended — while he was under trial.

It was tried in the case of a married woman for some time and I think with advantage But — the frequent occurrence of Hangnail obliged us to ce-

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linguish its use before a cure was effected.

I have now given the result of my observations on the use of Turpentine in Epilepsy and from a review of what has been said, we may be allowed to come to the following conclusions.

1st. That turpentine will be found well adapted to Epilepsy, proceeding from the irritation of worms in the Alimentary Canal

2d That in Epilepsy arising from other causes than worms, it will be found most useful in such cases as are of recent date - and connected with a state of the system indicating the use of tonic remedies -

and

Lastly - that as far as I have seen it will prove either totally inefficacious or exceedingly pernicious in all cases.

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of long standing - and in such as are of an Hereditary nature —

No 25

1818

Use of
Calomel
in the fevers of children.
Jno Carothers